

► The Menace of Japan *was*  
*scorned into oblivion.*

## HE WARNED US AGAINST JAPAN

BY EDWARD HUNTER

IT is time we made amends to a genial, shy Irishman named Taid O'Conroy — Tim to those who knew him. O'Conroy is dead now: not assassinated, as he had expected to be, but harassed to death because of the book which he gave us, and which we rejected, ten years ago. The book was *The Menace of Japan*. It was one of the first to expose the every-Jap-a-god mentality which even then had long been the motivating force of Nipponese world policy. O'Conroy pleaded with us to believe that this fanatical attitude, shared by the entire nation, made a Jap attack on America inevitable, but he succeeded only in arousing a few feeble shoulder shrugs.

One man in the Occident did take him seriously — another Irishman named George Bernard Shaw. "I want to tell people to read *The Menace of Japan*," GBS wrote.

"Prof. O'Conroy is one of the most remarkable men in the world. . . . The book is a revelation. Japan is a menace — to the West as well as to the East." All others — critics, experts, particularly American liberals — sneered and scowled the book into oblivion. As we look back now, in the midst of the war in the Pacific, upon O'Conroy's shrill warning and its reception at the time, we can see ourselves as in a mirror, with our complacencies and illusions staring us remorselessly in the face.

Few libraries even have a copy of O'Conroy's book, for only 2,400 came off the presses. But if you locate one you will find that the last sentence on the last page reads: "I say that JAPAN WANTS WAR."

The capitals are the author's own; and he italicized the statement that ninety million Japanese

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EDWARD HUNTER, now on the war desk at the New York Post, has been a foreign correspondent and editor for seventeen years. He was editor of two newspapers in China, the Hankow Herald and the Peking Leader, and one in Japan, the Japan Advertiser. He was the only correspondent whose dispatches about the Japanese atrocities in Occupied Manchuria were read into the Minutes of the League of Nations.

"*know* they are divine." He described the "inherent cruelty" of the Japanese people. They constitute, he wrote:

A primitive tribe that has been trained in modern warfare, that has had the results of a Western mechanical civilization thrust suddenly upon them. . . . Behind the superficial veneer is the *knowledge* of a divine right to rule the world, that awareness of their superiority over peoples of the universe, and this has made them a race of religious fanatics whose God is Japan.

The volume made no impression, drawing merely a few sparks of righteous anger. Its 300 pages rated about a hundred words in the *New York Times*, where John Chamberlain wrote, on March 8, 1934:

The trouble with *The Menace of Japan* is that it is a book belonging to the international rabble-rousing class; it does not make it sufficiently plain that what Japan seeks to do in the Far East is only a repetition of what Western nations have been doing since Sir Francis Drake returned home with a cargo of loot for Queen Elizabeth. We will propose a test for writers: let them confess their own national sins before they accuse others. . . .

No one in America thought enough of O'Conroy's book to take up his main warnings one by one. We dismissed them wholesale and rested on the easy skepticism summed up in a review by Lewis Gannett in the *New York Herald Tribune* on March 7, 1934:

Mr. O'Conroy sometimes writes as if he never heard of other people who claim intimacy with God. He writes of spy manias, apparently, before our Jersey police had excitedly arrested Japanese tourists for photographing the Pulaski Skyway; his discussion of regimentation and dismissal of professors reads as if he had never heard of Bertrand Russell and Scott Nearing. He writes with scant perspective!

In the blindness that passed for tolerance, Mr. Gannett continued with a plea for "understanding" rather than "denunciation" of Japan — "a nation whose history, as a whole, is considerably more pacific than that of the Western empires." Then, as now, denunciation of your own country in the name of understanding of other countries was the mark of liberalism. Everywhere the claim was made that *The Menace of Japan* was exaggerated. Such things were obviously beyond belief, it was glibly pointed out. There was "small need" to investigate further charges made in a tract which contained such "fantastic" stuff as this:

To begin to understand the Japanese mentality and to penetrate his mind, it is absolutely essential to grasp to its uttermost significance this fact: the Japanese are convinced, they are even more than convinced, they *know*, that they are descended from the Gods; and further, they *know* that they are the only race on earth that can make this claim. . . . From this it follows naturally that a member of any other race in the world is a "barbarian."

This faith in their divine right has given them a tremendous, almost unbelievable conceit in themselves. It obtrudes upon every phase in their lives; it has given each individual a quiet, smug self-satisfaction of mind, and in their books and newspapers has reached a point that has become menacing.

Nathaniel Peffer, expert on Far Eastern affairs, joined in deploring Tim's rabble-rousing. "Mr. O'Conroy is only venting passions," he wrote in a review on March 18, 1934. "He has much to say, if only he could say it soberly. As it is, he cannot be taken seriously." O'Conroy, with complete accuracy, foretold the extent of Japan's aggressive aims. Mr. Peffer dismissed this as another proof of personal spleen:

Mr. O'Conroy has lived in Japan for fifteen years, part of the time as professor in Keio University, and it has got on his nerves. Mr. O'Conroy is exploding the cumulative fury of fifteen years, seeking ease in a book for the soreness of fifteen years of pin-pricking. . . . No race can be as satanic, as vicious, as barbarous as he says the Japanese are, and besides, not all of the members of any race can be covered by the same adjectives.

## II

Tim O'Conroy was, indeed, speaking from direct knowledge. For many years he had taught French and English in Tokyo's Naval College. He had fallen in love with and married a Japanese, adjusted his

life to the life of Nippon and moved freely in Japanese social circles. The country's ambitions and intentions had been expounded in his hearing as unreservedly as though he were a son of Nippon. Finally, it is true, he could listen no longer with equanimity. He abandoned a safe economic anchorage in order that he might warn Britain and the United States that the time for patient, academic detachment on Japanese policy had long passed. *The Menace of Japan* was that warning.

Having quoted one of Japan's great newspapers as saying that "Japan should subjugate the nations of the East and conquer the world at the point of the bayonet," O'Conroy insisted that this was no empty boast. It is "the essence of thought of the young Japan of to-day," he reported. Again and again he had heard sentiments no less extreme expressed in college essays by his own students:

There is only one thing fixed in the mind of every student leaving his school or university with any degree of certainty; I refer, of course, to Shinto. He has been fed with patriotic propaganda all his life and upon graduation is fanatical. This, combined with the scraps of information of other countries, with the lies that he has been told by his professors, make him the menace that he is. . . . I was in the position, through my status at Keio University, of meeting people in high

places. . . . I have said before that people will laugh at me. I am prepared for this. I know I am right. Japan will slowly carry out her plans as I have indicated.

In the first years of his Nipponese sojourn O'Conroy had paid little attention to politics. It was not until Japan began openly to prepare for its conquest of Manchuria that he was aroused from the spell of Japanese cherry blossoms and womanhood. In his chapter on Manchuria he writes:

It is probably since the Korean annexation in 1910 that the dream of Eastern subjugation has been germinating in Japan, and today this dream has grown into a colossal proposition of conquering the world. This statement, which I have repeated many times throughout the book, is not a mere fantasy. I can say from my own experience with many thousands of Japanese students, of ages from ten up to thirty-five, that this is a determination in the minds of the men of Japan, both civilians and military. I have corrected thousands upon thousands of essays during the fifteen years that I was teaching English in Japan, and this national view, or desire for world war, was insinuated into every essay upon every possible occasion.

Publication of *The Menace of Japan* in England, as already indicated, interested only Bernard

Shaw. But one American correspondent in London, William Hillman, did find it worth a dispatch to the New York *American*. The summary transmitted by cable makes curious reading in the light of events from Pearl Harbor to this day. Hillman told of O'Conroy's assertion that "Hawaii and the Philippines are objects of the conquest plans intended to give Japan control of the eastern Pacific." He quoted the book's warning that "the former German Pacific islands, given to Japan under the League of Nations mandate after the World War, are destined to be naval bases for defense against Britain and attack against the United States. Japan's eyes are on Siam, Shanghai, Singapore, Malaya, Burma, India, Hong Kong, Hawaii, the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, Indo-China, all Asia and Eastern Russia."

The time has passed, of course, when we can make any practical use of O'Conroy's remarkable forecast. But it is high time we saluted the memory of an Irish teacher who was maligned for his attempt to shatter our smugness.



THE sheep and the wolf are not agreed upon a definition of the word "liberty."

— ABRAHAM LINCOLN